

Not a Subtle, Manly Salmon by darkrosaleen

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Summary:

El has been stealing Will's clothes, so she decides to lend Will some of hers.

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Author's Note:

- For [gloss](#).

This tag was so cute I had to write it. Get Will Byers some flattering clothes, please.

Will knew that El had a klepto streak, but he had no idea about the flagrant clothing theft until they started living together.

Mike laughed himself sick when Will called to tell him. "Of course I knew, how many of my shirts have you seen her wearing? It's probably my fault, I taught her that stealing and wearing other people's clothes is normal."

"At this point it's just her style," Will said. "She could've stopped wearing stolen boy clothes a long time ago, but she didn't. Now she's like, half tomboy farmhand and half neon mallrat."

"And all El," Mike said dreamily. "Even if it's weird, she rocks it. I kind of think she's prettier like that, more than when she wears really girly stuff. Does that make me weird?"

Will's chest felt tight. "No way. You like her, and her clothes are part of who she is." Not that Will was an expert on what made girls pretty, but he knew that El was pretty, and that it mostly came from inside. El knew who she was and wasn't afraid to be exactly that.

Sometimes an awful part of Will was jealous that she'd never learned to be ashamed of being different.

"You should take it as a compliment," Mike said. "She only steals clothes from people she really likes. She says it's like a hug when you're apart." He went suddenly quiet, and Will swallowed the lump in his throat.

Today, El was wearing Will's favorite holey, bleach-stained navy sweatshirt over a t-shirt of Jonathan's and her own ripped jeans, standing in front of her mirror and holding up outfit after outfit.

El wrinkled her nose. "Too fancy," she said, throwing the green ruffly dress onto the bed next to Will. The discarded outfits pile now had most of her closet.

"It's just pizza and a movie," Will said. "You can wear what you're wearing now. Well, maybe swap the sweatshirt for one without holes."

El giggled. "I want to look good. Want them to like me." *Want to look normal*, Will heard. He wouldn't be much help there.

Will dug through the pile of discarded clothes, separating a pink short-sleeved blouse and a pair of black jeans from their respective partners. "How about these? You said the top was too girly, but try it with jeans instead of a skirt. And if you pair it with black instead of white, it'll look edgier and more punk."

El grinned at him. "Good eye, artist." She took the separates from Will and held them up against her body.

After a long time studying the outfit in the mirror, El turned around and threw the blouse at Will. "Try it on. It's a good color for you."

Will's heart jumped into his throat. "This is a girl's shirt, El. And it's pink." Very, *very* pink. And not a subtle, manly salmon, but bright, Barbie doll hot pink. Holly had toys this color.

El narrowed her eyes at him. "You said it wasn't girly. You said edgy and punk."

"That doesn't mean—I meant if you wear it, because you're already a girl." Will's stomach twisted in knots. "Look, I know it's total bullshit, you wear boy clothes all the time and it's fine, but it's different when boys wear girl clothes."

El's expression fell. She shoved the pile of clothes out of the way and sat on the bed next to Will. "It's just a shirt with buttons," she said, taking the blouse from him and holding it up. "Jonathan has shirts like this. And Steve wears pink."

Will laughed. "Steve's a cool guy, he can wear anything and make it look good. I'm a shy nerd who's new in town. If I wore that, I'd be

laughed back to Hawkins."

El bumped her shoulder against Will's. "You're cool, Will. You like cool punk bands and cool edgy clothes. If these kids don't like you, *they're* bullshit."

Will suddenly knew that if the kids at their school decided to shun him, El would take his side and get herself shunned too. Throat suddenly tight, he squeezed El's hand, then reached for the hem of his shirt. "Don't get mad if I decide not to wear it, I'm just trying it on."

The pink shirt hung differently on Will's flat, skinny chest. You couldn't really tell that it was cut for a girl—it just looked loose and boxy and angular, skimming right above his waist. He looked cool, but not in a normal high school boy way.

El appeared behind him in the mirror and rested her chin on his shoulder. "Nancy said pink looks good with brown eyes. See how big and dark they look?"

They really did look different, warmer and deeper with red and purple undertones. Will's hair color had more depth too, and his skin looked pale and clear. For the first time in a long time, Will felt—

"Pretty," El murmured, catching his eyes in the mirror. Will opened his mouth to tell her that boys couldn't be pretty, but they were both deeply, intimately aware that it wasn't true.

El walked over to the closet, digging around for a pair of black combat boots that she dropped at Will's feet. "Black," she said, tugging on his faded light wash jeans. "Edgy. Punk. Make yourself a cool guy like Steve, and no one will laugh."

Will's breath stuck in his throat. It was stupid, he couldn't just wear different clothes and make himself cool. But as he looked at his reflection, something warm and happy fluttered in his stomach. His clothes looked like *him*: soft and tough, dark and bright, different but still cool.

Will smiled. "Fine, you win. What are you going to wear? Do you need to borrow anything?"

El frowned at the pile of clothes on the bed. She yanked a bright lavender skirt from the bottom of the pile, then took off Will's sweatshirt. She held the skirt up over Jonathan's Ramones tee, beaming wildly at her reflection. She went back into her closet for yellow high-tops, which somehow totally pulled the purple and black together.

"Good eye," Will said, putting his chin on her shoulder. "We almost match."

"Bitchin'," El said, looking from his reflection back to her own. She reached between them and squeezed Will's hand. He squeezed back.